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Senior Executive Intelligence Brief



Tuesday, 11 July 2000

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EAST ASIA

Koreas: *Analytic Perspective*

No Rush to Unification

The Koreans are aiming to defer final unification while pursuing economic and political cooperation and narrowing the gap between their plans. Both sides have publicly espoused a process spanning 10 years or more before complete integration is possible.

— Both Koreaes see cooperation as beneficial, but neither is inclined to incur the risks to economic and political stability that would attend rapid unification.

South Korean President Kim's public pronouncements suggest he has concluded that achieving his massive aid plan for North Korea depends on domestic and international perceptions that unification is a long-term process that will foster stability on the Peninsula and will not cripple the South's economy. Polls show South Koreans are more optimistic about reconciliation than in the past and are willing to pay increased taxes to assist the North but do not seek to achieve unification quickly.

North Korean Leader Remains Wary

Kim Chong-il most likely sees the lessons of German unification and the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe as signs his country would be absorbed and his legacy obliterated by a stronger South Korea in a quick unification. North Korea's propaganda contains cautionary notes that unification should not be achieved by one side "conquering" the other.

— P'yongyang's official media maintain that unifying the different political systems is a task best left to "posterity to settle . . . slowly in the future."

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

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Anecdotal evidence on North Korean public attitudes suggests the populace welcomes engagement with South Korea as a solution to the North's economic ills. A strong sense of national identity and the regime's repeated warnings about the negative affects of German unification and the Soviet Union's dissolution, however, suggest the populace would see quick unification as capitulation to Seoul.  

Comparisons to the unexpected speed of German unification do not take into account the North's isolation and the degree to which North Korea has indoctrinated its people. 